

RI President John Kenny's Message

My fellow Rotarians,

Each of us has, at one time or another, been asked the question, what is Rotary? There are many ways to answer, depending on the questioner, the context, and the time available. The shortest and simplest answer is that Rotary is the world's oldest service club organization. This is, of course, an accurate but necessarily incomplete response, for any true understanding of Rotary must include an explanation of how we in Rotary strive through our service to achieve more than the goal of each individual project. By working together in our clubs, our districts, and internationally, we strive to establish the simple foundations of a better society: friendship, trust, honesty, and hope.

The structure of Rotary, along with our international club projects, helps make friendly connections between Rotarians in different countries. Our emphasis on ethical and honest behavior works to build strong and open relationships between people and nations. Our service projects in water, health and hunger, and literacy help eliminate many of the practical obstacles to peace. And our Rotary Foundation and Rotary Youth Exchange programs go a step beyond by training the leaders of tomorrow to be active builders of a more peaceful world.

These programs help shape responsible citizens of better communities -- people who will have a broad and nuanced perspective, enhanced by opened eyes and open minds. They will be indelibly marked by their experiences, and throughout their lives -- both now and in their later careers -- they will not keep the benefits of these experiences to themselves. These are the people who will help build the kind of future that we as Rotarians strive to create through our every action.

What is Rotary? It is a network of people who care -- people who are both realists and optimists. We recognize the challenges before us and our own limitations; we also recognize our abilities and our responsibility to use them to the fullest. If we are ever to realize Paul Harris' vision for Rotary as an organization that promotes goodwill among nations, then, as he wrote, "the hearts of men must be so touched and molded that mutual understanding and goodwill will take the place of fear and hatred." In this, World Understanding Month, we do well to remember these words -- and to remember as well that in all of our service, we reach for the larger goal of fellowship, understanding, and peace.